

How does the hybridization of knowledge production influence the development of Social Indicators within evidence-based-policy making processes?

The Case of an European Expert-Group on Indicators

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Research Stream Sociology of Knowledge (5)*

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Abstract

As mentioned in the call, “SoK has developed into a field...that is lively and flourishing.” As pointed out further, the SoK no longer focuses on high-level theoretical thinking, instead concentrates on typifications of everyday-life. My project illustrates this change and focuses on developments in the area of policy-making. In this area decisions increasingly base on knowledge/evidence produced by external experts. This knowledge is used to reduce uncertainties by calculating the risks involved in the final decision and by this to legitimize political decisions by delivering hard-facts in the argumentation (e.g. “evidence-based-policy-making”).

A consequence of this decision-making process is the authoritative implementation of theoretical knowledge and direct application into the context of everyday-life. Furthermore, studies show changes in the process of knowledge production for the recent eras of ‘knowledge- or rather risk-society’. Instead of linear-ordered knowledge-production, hybrid forums of heterogeneous actors with different knowledge-backgrounds have become important. These actors debate solutions to a problem and co-construct a contextualized form of knowledge as decision-making-base.

This study assesses and analyses how social indicators (as an example for political evidence) are developed by hybrid forums at the EU-policy-level. The empirical case study reconstructs structures and processes within an “European Expertgroup on Indicators” by multiple-triangulations. This group designs indicators by using transdisciplinary- and transnational expert-discourses. Based on multiple data sources my study offers information on how evidence is produced in decision-making within such hybrid forums, e.g. important factors, processes and structures influencing indicator-systems.

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Research Stream Sociology of Knowledge

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The Case of a European Expert-Group on Indicators”

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INTEGRATIVE RESEARCH UNIT
ON SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL
DEVELOPMENT


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Agenda

1. Theoretical framework: A short overview
2. Case Study
 - 2.1 Context and Motivation of the Study
 - 2.2 Research Design: A multiple triangulation
3. Descriptive Results
4. Conclusion

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 The demand for socially robust knowledge in evidence based policy processes

Contextualisation of Knowledge

- Knowledge has become a central criterion for influencing and controlling modern society and social change
- Calculative knowledge is produced as base for decisions to fade out uncertainty (e. g „Evidence-based-decision-making“ or evidence based policy making)
- **Example:** Social Indicators are a traditional source of evidence

⇒ *Knowledge is produced in the context of application and becomes binding*

Conflict with traditional mono-disciplinary scientific knowledge

- Specific social context of the decision
- Traditional (mono-) disciplinary knowledge is often not precise enough for a specific case of decision making
 - normally bases on assumptions and restrictions and is produced to be universal valid,

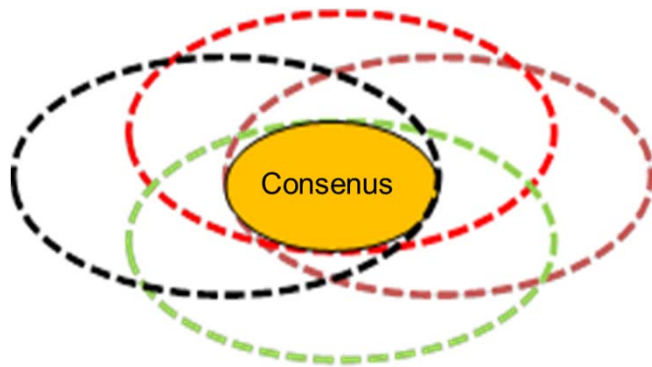
⇒ *Demand for “socially robust knowledge”*

1.2 The New Mode of Indicator Production

- As a reaction the Mode of Indicator Production changed
- Hybrid forum opened for other “expert” perspectives
 - Heightening the context of knowledge production
 - Broadening the context of knowledge production (e.g. practioners, policy makers, representatives of the target groups)

Mayor Goal of the discourse:

- Bargaining / combining different forms of knowledge into a broadest possible consensus of relevant stakeholders and their heterogeneous world of relevancies (forms of knowledge, interests, strategies, practices)



=> Legitimation

=> Social robustness

=> „Social reporting leaving tunnel vision of disciplinary context“ (Mardorf, 2006).

2. Case Study

2.1 Context and Motivation of the Study



Study Context of the case study

- An European Indicator Expert Group chaired by the European Commission
- Mayor Target: Set up a Dashboard of Indicators to promote evidence based policy making in the EU Policy area.

Why to reconstruct structures and processes of this group?

Form a perspective of a sociology of knowledge :

- Hybrid Forum with different disciplinary and national worlds of relevancies
- Example for the development of indicators in a heterogeneous context (transdisciplinary, transnational)

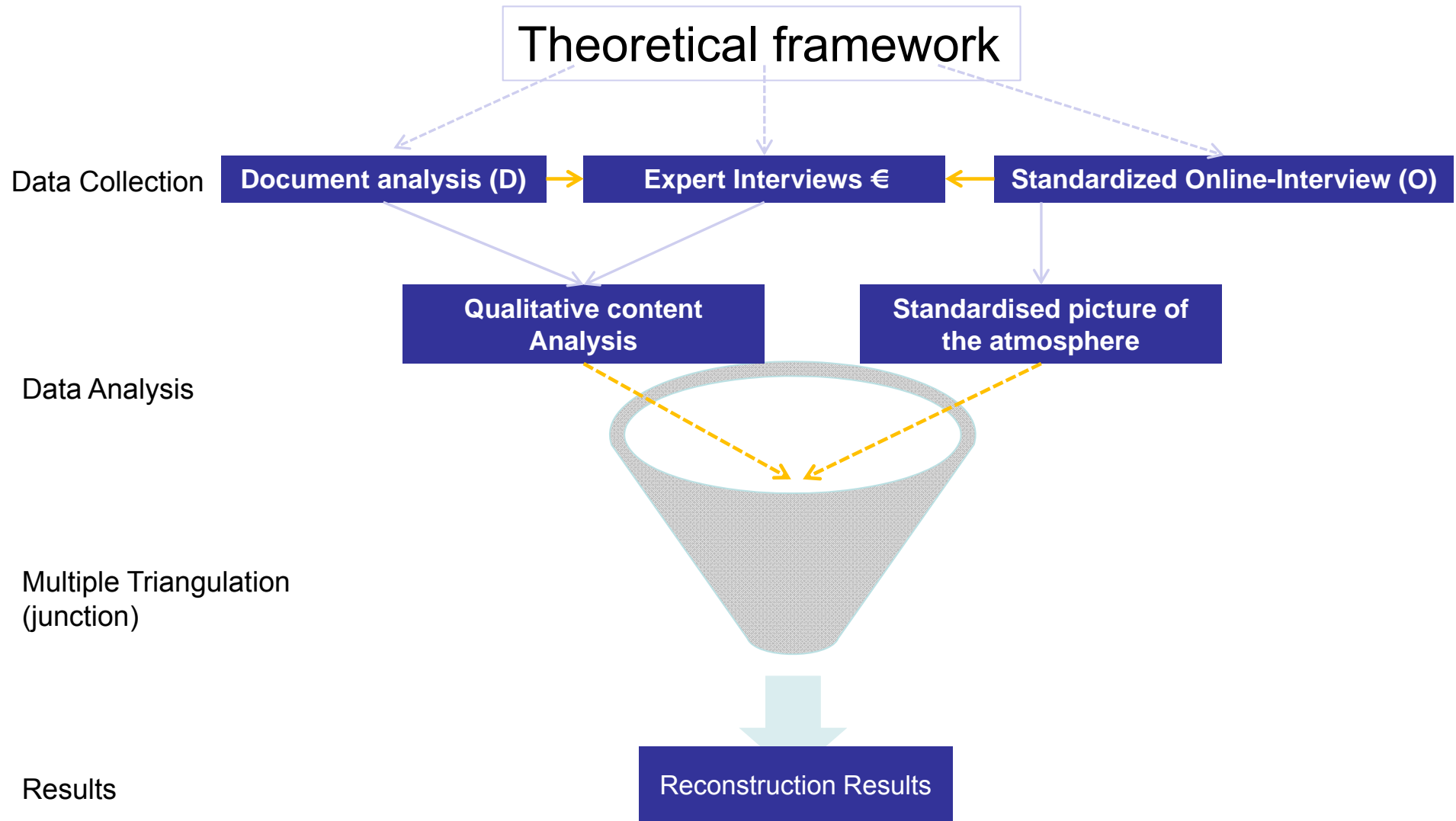
Research questions:

1 . How is knowledge produced in hybrid forums? Which factors play a role?

2. How is the production of indicators affected by the heterogeneous context/ interests of the experts ?

3. What are possibilities and limitations of the use of this indicators on national and international level?

2.2 Research Design: A multiple Triangulation



=> Compensation of weaknesses, one-sidedness and biases of single method or perspective.

4.2 Research Design of the reconstruction: A multiple Triangulation

Multiple triangulation mean a mix of ...:

- ✓ ... **different methods:** analysis of documents , stand. Online interviews, expert interviews
 - By this bounds/frontiers of each method should overstepped
 - **reactive methods:** Interview (open), closed survey (closed)
 - **nonreactive methods :** analysis of documents(closed)
- ✓ =... **different perspectives** (national researchers, national policy makers, different viewpoints of European policymakers)
- ✓ ... **different conditions of Knowledge**, by analysing in different points of time within the research process

=> Compensation of weaknesses, one-sidedness and biases of the particular methods

(Flick, 2011; Ingenkamp & Lissmann 2005 ; Kuckartz, 2012; Lamnek 2005; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010; Steinke, 2008)

3. Descriptive Results

3.1 Structural Factors effecting knowledge production

1. Composition of the Group:

- The Expert Group is hybrid forum , with heterogeneous worlds of relevancies) (D;O;E)
 - transnational (from different (candidate) member states) (D;O;E)
 - transdisciplinary (national researchers, statistical offices, national politics, European politics/statistics) (D;O;E)
- Heterogeneous consensus frame, because national world of relevancies are the dominant perspective of expert acting (in relation to EU Citizen or EU-Perspective) (O, E)
- Reasons for this perspective of action
 - Invitation procedure (E)
 - Setting (E)
 - Experts do not really feel like an Expert in the group context (E),

=> **Structurally:** *hybrid forum consisting of stakeholders with heterogeneous world of relevancies which share their perspectives and co-produce knowledge*

3. Descriptive Results

3.2 Process of Knowledge production

- 2) *The hierarchical structure of the Group allows the commission to control the processes of knowledge production*
- the Commission has different possibilities to frame the knowledge production in at least three steps) (D;O;E)
 1. Agenda setting for the group and the discussions at the meeting, e.g. specifying the key areas of the field action (**agenda-driven approach**)
 2. Criteria indicators have to fulfil (**data-driven approach**, easy to understand and interpret, limit of indicators per area, ...)
 3. Final decisions is on the commission as principal (E)
 - Not always based on the discussions
 - Not transparent (“black box”)
- => ***In practice:*** *The open knowledge production and the discussion processes are framed and controlled by the commission*

3. Descriptive Results

3. *Important competencies in the co-production process of the experts group.*

- “hard and traditional” forms of knowledge in indicators production **(E)**
 - Deep Statistical Knowledge
 - Knowledge of existing data sets **(O,E)**
- Pragmatic Process of indicators production. („facts instead of theories“ **(E)**)
 - scientific theories, play no role in discussions and are not important („facts instead of theories“ **(E)**)
 - Number of indicators per area are limited by a fix specification **(D;)**
 - Best practices are discussed **(D,E)**
- Soft Skills (negotiation, flexibility) and fluent English language are important requirements for conversation and by this for knowledge input. **(O, E)**

=> The knowledge process is influenced by some of the traditional forms of knowledge, but also by soft skills and the personality of the experts

3. Descriptive Results

3.3 Result/Outcome: The Dashboard as a source of knowledge

National level (E)

- a clear arranged knowledge system
- is good to get an overview over Core Area in Europe
- For deeper Analysis they need additional sources like national Information systems, or target orientated exchange with colleagues

=> Good starting point for an Analysis

European level (E)

- It has some relevance!
 - Detailed Reports of the commission that include all indicators of the Dashboard are preferred (=> relevance for EU policy)
 - On the other hand knowledge coming from the dashboard is not enough to draw a detailed picture because for that the detailed report needs much more indicators.

=> Knowledge coming from the dashboard is usable, and to some extend has a value, but very limited as evidence for decision (E;O)

4 Conclusion

- This Expert Group is a hybrid forum in multiple ways
 - The Indicator production differs from the traditional scientific production
 - The traditional mode starts with a theory which guides researcher through the process of finding the best possible indicator („**theory driven approach**“)
 - In contrast, the new Mode 2 is much more pragmatic and effected by different factors
 - Group composition and the different worlds of relevancies
 - Priorities of action, national and international (agenda driven approach)
 - Practical criteria like existing of data (data driven approach)
 - Hierarchy in the group
 - Soft Skills of the actor
 - Etc.
- ⇒ The final conclusion depends on the perspective of the user.
- ⇒ Under strong scientific conditions you find many different points for critics, which argument against a use of the Dashboard
 - ⇒ In other Cases of usage it seems to be accepted and valuable as source of knowledge.

4. Conclusion

Interviewstatement of “Expert Eurostat 1” Z 74:

“We pray ourselves on this idea of high quality standards. In some cases, it would seem that we are perhaps putting to much emphasis on quality and not enough emphasis on responsiveness and flexibility. So it may be that for some policy purposes you don't need the extreme high quality information.”

Thank you for your attention!

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